

Sermon Outlines.

THE LIVING SACRIFICE.

BY D. C. CHRISTNER. (A. D. 1875.)

"I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Rom. xii, 1.

The message of the Gospel comes to us, not as the mandate of an imperial to his subjects, nor with the haughty and arrogant demands of a heartless master to his slaves; but it comes as a pleading letter from a wounded father, or the sobs and tears of a broken-hearted wife as, kneeling by his side and throwing her arms about his neck, she pleads in prayer to God and begs of her erring husband to reform of the sin that is crushing her heart. It comes not as an irresistible force from heaven to sweep away man's freedom in action or volition, or to bind and fetter his will with the results of unchangeable laws, in the eternity before his existence; but it comes as the memory of unrequited love in the tearful pleadings of a now sainted mother, as they come sweeping through the gates of death into the heart of an undutiful child—under the sound of the falling earth, as it strikes her coffin. The silent but eloquent lips, now sealed in death, carry a language and power to his soul that his heart, *alone*, can interpret. But our tears and grief, independent of our repentance and reformation, can *never* atone for these earthly wrongs; and both reason and Scripture teach, that Christianity is something exceeding in greatness simply a state of mind, or the sickly flame of mere public sentiment.

Acknowledging and teaching the spiritual nature of man, it has founded thereon a standard of morals, and human duty, infinitely more grand and noble than the ever-varying shades and standards of a tame morality. As the traveler, ascending the mountain-top, is lifted by its giant arms far above the fogs and clouds of dust, and the poisonous malaria that hang about its base, into a purer atmosphere and a more lofty and extended prospect; so Christ lifts the human heart, in its conceptions of duty, far above the highest standards of morality, and the noxious vapors of human philosophy. Back of all

the possible earthly relations of man, Christ reveals the relations of man to God, and the spiritual Brotherhood of man with all the shining hierarchies of heaven; and, linking his soul to the celestial throng, arms him with new motives, and new principles, and opens to his heart an inexhaustible fountain of delights.

To attain to this degree of healthfulness and happiness of the human spirit, man must quit the plains of sin, and ascend the mountain of God's righteousness and holiness.

The clouds of grief and the chilling influences of the poisonous malaria of sin, will ever hang about its base; and like the deadly nightshade, every flower that blooms at its foot, blooms but in deception—to poison his soul. The way to happiness, therefore, is the way of duty; and the way of duty is the way to God. "Go through, go through the gates"—said the prophet—"prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people." Paul declares to the Hebrews, "Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and a living way, which he hath consecrated for us, that is to say his flesh, . . . Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

Jesus, coming down from the mountain, has "cast up" the highway of holiness, and gathered out the stones, and bridged the yawning precipices and the rushing torrents, down the mountain-side. The standards that he erected are his foot-steps of blood, imprinted on the rocks, as he walked toward Calvary, "bearing his cross;" and Peter wrote:

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." Jesus prepared the way, but man's salvation depends on walking in his foot-steps—both in his obedience to God, and his sacrifice for man.

As the angels were sent to Lot, as he sat in the gates of Sodom at even, to plead with him and induce him to flee for his life from the consuming fire from heaven; so Jesus has sent the angels of his covenant to the gates of the sinner's Sodom, to plead with and persuade him to return to God. Listen to the pleadings of Peter: "For if God spared not

the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes . . . making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly." "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, . . . and how shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation?!"

And, like the solemn tones of a pleading father with an erring child, the language of our text comes floating to our ears, "I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service." Everything of value has its price; and the price of salvation is the sacrifice of self, and a consecration of our all, to Christ. There can be no acceptable worship, without an acceptable sacrifice. There can be no acceptable sacrifice, without an acceptable altar. And there can be no acceptable altar without an acceptable priest. These are the golden links that bind the soul of man to the anchor of hope; and, reaching within the veil, lay hold of the throne of God. In all the experiences of the human heart, and the history of the storms that have troubled the sea of humanity, for nearly six thousand years, the thought of an acceptable sacrifice, propitiating the favor and blessing of heaven, has been the world's greatest solace and comfort. Ever since the gates of paradise were closed against man, the human family has felt that the face of God could only be seen at the altar; and that the prayers of man could only reach his ear, as they were borne to heaven, on the wings of the ascending smoke of a sacrificial fire.

The millions of altars, from Eden down to the present, shining through the annals of history like the stars at midnight, proclaim the fall of man, and his confidence in the atoning merits of sacrifice. If sin were only a debt and not a crime, it might have been forgiven; and man might have been redeemed without an altar; but sin